

Kathmandu – The United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) announced today that it will transfer its regional office in Itahari, Sunsari district to Janakpur, Dhanusa district. USAID/OTI programming out of the Itahari regional office has been hindered by recent flooding and the shift to Janakpur will enable the program to continue providing assistance to districts throughout the Terai. The new regional office in Janakpur will open in early December 2008.

The breakdown of road transportation across the Saptakoshi area has impeded USAID/OTI's ability to serve communities to the west of the river, notably in Siraha and Saptari as well as Sarlahi, Mahottari, and Dhanusha. In order to better support these and other districts in Terai, USAID/OTI will be closing its regional office in Itahari and re-opening in Janakpur. However, USAID/OTI will continue assistance to districts east of the Saptakoshi for activities that encourage dialogue on the political transition and public participation in the peace process.

USAID/OTI funding is exclusively designated to support a peaceful, democratic transition in Nepal and cannot be realigned for flood relief. However, USAID/Nepal will continue to provide flood relief assistance to Sunsari and other flood-affected districts in the Terai through other programs.

"USAID/Nepal has recently provided \$921,100 to assist the Government of Nepal to meet critical flood relief and recovery needs," said Beth S. Paige, Mission Director of USAID/Nepal. "We hope this assistance will address the new development priorities in Sunsari. We also believe that the shift of the USAID/OTI regional office from Itahari to Janakpur will enable us to continue to support the peace process and democratic transition in districts throughout the Terai."

USAID/OTI opened a regional office in Itahari, Sunsari in July 2007 and has since then worked with several local NGOs in Ilam, Jhapa, Dhankuta, Morang, Sunsari, Udayapur, Saptari, and Siraha to support the peace process. During the past year, USAID/OTI funded 50 grants totaling \$1.5 million for programs in Sunsari district and neighboring areas to increase access to information, diversify public debate on issues critical to the political transition and raise local-level participation in the peace process.